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THE END OF THE BEGINNING

By Edna Lonigan

The New Deal is dead but the evil that it did lives on. Because it is now without a leader, a party or even a symbol, we tend to forget how deep were the changes it made, and how much effort will be needed to repair the damage wrought.

Political changes in this country after 1933 are usually pictured as a growth in the power of the executive, or even of one man. Such superficial analysis ignores the fact that the New Deal was part of a world-wide retreat from responsible representative government which began a generation ago and has now become almost universal.

The people of the United States were almost unconsciously swept into this rout. We lived for 14 years in a revolution, but it was revolution under an anesthetic. The change in American government was the work of appointed officials. Most citizens were outside what HUMAN EVENTS has well described as our own Iron Curtain.

Neither the death of Mr. Roosevelt nor the Republican Congressional victory has ended this counterrevolution against the fundamental principles of the Republic. But the Congress now about to convene can at least bring the crisis into the light. The final decision can then be made by alerted voters, rather than by officials who stand to gain from further surreptitious growth of their power.

Americans are disheartened because our efforts to make a "people's peace" have been met with doubt and cynicism. The reason is that we do not know what we mean when we talk of a "people's peace" and are even uncertain as to whether we want free enterprise or an officially planned economy at home. Every one outside the United States recognizes the split that runs through our contemporary political thinking. And as we solemnly attempt to decide the future of other nations, of which we know little or nothing, it would seem reasonable to devote at least a portion of our intelligence to our own future.

American political institutions no longer rest, as formerly, upon hard rock. The ground beneath them has been mined. We cannot have peace at home or peace in the world until our own foundations have been re-established.

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II

All over the world, governments have enlarged their economic powers since 1918. But this has happened as a sequel to another, less obvious, revolution under way in the political field. Two cataclysms have joined to make the tidal wave of change in our time.

The economic innovation was to develop the role of government as an agent of production. Under many different forms, governments have taken over the direction of capital and markets. The new economic role of the State as enterpriser can be traced back to the "national workshops" of 1848 in France. The lavish promises made for these ateliers nationaux are still repeated. Their lugubrious failure is forgotten.

State Socialism, however begun, soon shifts to an oligarchy in which a small elite assumes control of the productive life of the nation. The voters have far less influence on its higher strategy than have small stockholders of a big corporation. The voters cannot sell their "shares" and invest elsewhere when governmental mistakes are made.

The political revolution of our time depends on the technique of organizing voters into masses. It was first perfected by Louis Napoleon Bonaparte of France, whose assets -- recognizable by Americans -- were a well-known family name and demagogic skill in manipulating crowds. Blocs of voters, swayed by deceitfully clever propaganda, give the man who organizes them the plebiscites he needs to be returned to office again and again. So Louis Napoleon, elected President of France in 1848 by over five million votes, had himself made Emperor, in 1852, by a plebiscite of eight million votes. In the words of an English historian (E. Lipson): "The fundamental idea underlying the Napoleonic regime was that of inverted democracy, Caesarism founded upon a popular basis."

Napoleon III, as he called himself to exploit the name of his famous [illegible], solved the problem of establishing personal power in the era of [illegible]versal suffrage. He showed how the right to vote could be neutralized by propaganda; how, without depriving the citizens of their franchise, a skillful leader could keep them from voting the government party out and the opposition in. "Inverted democracy" restored the Prince.

Years later Hitler saw how to adapt "inverted democracy" to the age of radio. "Men are won less by the written than by the spoken word," he said in the preface to Mein Kampf. Roosevelt wrote practically nothing, other than speeches.

The undermining of a free society from within, by calculated debauchery of its citizens, has a long tradition. Bread and circuses in Rome; art and poison in Florence -- much the same wiles are de-

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scribed by all the great political writers. Circe who, with siren voice and sweet song, turned men into pigs and made them forget their natural dignity, was no idle myth. That legend shows the way in which the practical Greeks taught each generation the hazards of political life.

Louis Napoleon is notable primarily as the first of the modern Caesars, marching at the head of columns of docile voters, chorusing "Ya! Ya!; Yes! Yes!; Oui! Oui!" as the case may be. Today any leader with a mass following will outstrip the little Napoleon by taking over economic as well as political control. Any party (like the British Labor Party) which begins by storming the economic heights will soon be controlled by the party leader most skilled in using Bonapartist blocs in his climb to power. The man to watch in England is the man who aspires to be Attlee's successor.

III

The same double (political and economic) revolution that took place in Germany and Russia has been proceeding here. But in the United States, sleeping pills were used instead of concentration camps.

No one in the Administration actually "planned it that way." A few clever men saw that with lump-sum appropriations they could spend increasing amounts of money for purposes so vague and noble that Congress would not oppose them. The big spending agencies were the political arm for the creation of a mass following and a propaganda front. Harry Hopkins kept first place among New Dealers because he best understood the arts of Bonapartist collectivism. Many people still think of "blocs" as pressure groups. A pressure group wants to influence the law; a bloc merely surrenders judgment to the chief.

The New Deal democracy was not a representative party, based on free individual choices, but a pyramid of blocs -- farmers, labor, Jews, Negroes, Southern Democrats, little business men, etc.; there was the right bait for all of them. American foreign policy, from the destroyer-bases deal to Tehran and Yalta, was not the policy of a government answerable to its citizens. Again it was like the personal rule of Louis Napoleon, of whom Bismarck said: "He was vaguely aware that he needed a war."

Congress saw what was going on, but nevertheless surrendered -- in effect -- the all-important power of the purse. Congressional alertness made it necessary, however, that the coup d'état in the United States should not be alarming. Thus the American experiment in collectivism showed that the leader need not have a secret police if he has enough fiat money to lull the voters to sleep.

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Many people noted the rise of bureaucratic collectivism in the economic sphere but wistfully expected that Congress would stop it. Others observed the linking of incongruous blocs, but hopefully assumed that an old-fashioned bankruptcy would end irresponsible government. Few realized that the government which manipulates the masses can have its own managed currency, and therefore cannot be stopped by insolvency. The confluence of two revolutions has so magnified the power of the State in our time that none of the traditional defenses of Society can be counted on to protect the latter.

IV

The war was fought without waking us from our dream. While the people supplied soldiers and guns, political strategists of the inner circle consolidated the all-powerful State. At the end of the war they had assembled all the money and all the powers they needed to continue the collectivist leadership State in peacetime.

By the accident of Roosevelt's death these powers are now in the hands of a President who has not used them for the purpose for which they were designed. The voters freed themselves from the spell when Circe's song was stilled. Now the question is whether Americans can learn to confront, in a few years of grace, the problems that Europeans have failed to solve in the century since 1848.

Napoleon III and Hitler are not important for their personal vices. They are historically significant because they so skillfully exploited the real weakness of urban industrial society, the masses who have no education in freedom. Both Madison and Jefferson foresaw that weakness, and warned us against it.

The American Republic cannot now be restored without a struggle. Power-seekers do not stop unless they are stopped. Would-be "leaders," like Wallace and Pepper, know how to convert mass propaganda into absolutist power. The Communists lead from the rear. They have adopted all the Nazi techniques for building the leadership State by "inverted democracy." Only greater strength and greater faith will stop them. The Constitution cannot save us. The question is whether we are wise and strong enough to save the Constitution.

In all probability the year that is dawning will show whether we have it in us to give an affirmative answer.

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